

CD 2012--67



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

2012-13
season

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

David Briskin, Director of Orchestral Studies and Conductor
Omar Ho, clarinet

Thursday, October 4, 2012
7:30 p.m. MacMillan Theatre
Edward Johnson Building

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

David Briskin, Conductor

Academic Festival Overture

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622

W. A. Mozart

(1756-1791)

Allegro

Adagio

Rondo: Allegro

Omar Ho, clarinet

UTSO Concerto Competition Winner

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 4, in D minor, Op. 120

Robert Schumann

(1810-1855)

Ziemlich langsam – Lebhaft

Romanze: Ziemlich langsam

Scherzo: Lebhaft

Langsam – Lebhaft

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Program Notes

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897) Academic Festival Overture (1880)

Brahms never went to university. At the age of 20, however, he spent the summer hanging-out at the University of Göttingen with his friend the violinist Joseph Joachim, successfully avoiding classes and academic work. Nocturnal research at the students' club yielded rich results in the field of student songs, but no academic paper. Almost three decades later, at the age of 47, his youthful studies were to bear fruit. In 1879, the degree-less Brahms accepted an honorary doctorate from the University of Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland). A man of few words, Brahms gave no learned speech in return for his diploma which described him as *Artis musicae severioris in Germania nunc principi* ("the most famous living German composer of serious music"). Instead, some months later, he responded to the solemnity of the occasion by conducting a new, witty and appropriately learned overture in a concert of his own music in Breslau.

"It's a pretty medley of songs *à la* *Opé*," he said to his biographer in a characteristically understated, self-deprecating manner. The reference is to von Suppé's overture *Flotte Bursche*, which incorporates student songs, including one used by Brahms, into a tuneful, if lame, opera overture. Brahms knew he had to aim higher. The Academic Festival Overture skilfully weaves four drinking songs into a developed – and often disguised – sonata-form structure. It opens with a hushed, mysterious take on the Rákóczi March. The mood is solemn and mock-serious, befitting the academic environment in which the piece was first heard. The guessing game continues with an imposing chorale-like statement of the first recognisable student song *Wir hatten gebauet ein stättliche Haus* ("We have built a stately house"). A second

theme the *Landesvater*, is transformed into a quintessentially Brahmsian second subject. Then, chuckling sardonically on the bassoons, comes the freshmen's song *Was kommt dort von der Höh* ("What comes from afar") – which, given the intense Brahms-Wagner rivalry at the time, might be seen as a parody of the Apprentices' theme from *Die Meistersinger*. Brahms keeps one more trick up his sleeve as cascading strings and additional percussion herald a grand chorale on the universal student song *Gaudeamus Igitur*. This is Brahms at his most unbuttoned. "Live life while we're all still young," is the message of this student drinking-song, whose roots reach back to the 13th century, as Brahms lavishes the most extravagant orchestra he was ever to employ on an overture that gleefully places the 'academic' second to the 'festive'.

W. A. MOZART (1756-1791) Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622 (1791)

The Clarinet Concerto is Mozart's valedictory composition, a work that shares the profundity and depth of the late piano concertos with the autumnal tone of the *Requiem* that he was working on at his death. The music has a serenity and resignation that is hard to dissociate from Mozart's last few weeks of life. Mozart wrote the concerto for Anton Stadler (1753-1812), the finest clarinetist of his day, renowned for the warm tone he produced in the lower, *chalmereau* register of the instrument. An extension to his clarinet added a few bass notes beyond those of the regular instrument. It's for the wider range of Stadler's basset clarinet that Mozart wrote both the Clarinet Quintet and, a little more than a year later, the Concerto, one of the most sublime works in the repertoire.

The orchestral instrumentation adds to the generally mellow tone. Avoiding the brighter oboes, Mozart concentrates

on pairs of the softer flutes, bassoons and horns, together with strings. The bass line is often for cello alone, without bass. From the start, Mozart favours the clarinet's ability to sustain a singing melodic line. But the opening theme is also carefully designed to accommodate intricate contrapuntal development with the other instruments. Mozart asks for a wealth of tone colour from the soloist, together with much passagework, scales, arpeggios and mellifluous phrasing. The melody of the slow movement is one of the simplest yet most profound that Mozart wrote, reaching a heightened feeling of emotion with each variation. On paper, the finale, with its closely related themes, has the contours of a carefree and spirited rondo movement. It is, moreover, in the major key. But there is an underlying melancholy to its pages and the tonality frequently veers to the minor. The work was quickly recognized as a masterpiece and has never left the concert repertoire.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Symphony No. 4, in D minor, Op. 120
(1841 rev. 1851)

Towards the end of May 1841, eight months after her wedding, pianist Clara Wieck Schumann wrote in a marriage diary: "Sometimes I hear D minor strains resounding wildly in the distance. I know that another work is being created deep within his soul." Robert Schumann was at work on his D minor symphony. He completed it in time for his wife's 22nd birthday in September, the day their first child, Marie, was christened. It marked the end of a remarkable year, which was to be known from then on as Schumann's 'symphonic' year.

The previous September, Schumann had written in their shared marriage diary: "I have ventured into a territory where, to be sure, not every first step is successful." It wasn't marriage he was referring to, or to the year of song writing

that he was well into, but to the symphonic music that lay ahead. By the end of 1841, Schumann had completed his B flat Symphony, the *Overture, Scherzo and Finale* (his *Symphonette*, as he liked to refer to it), a *Phantasie* in A minor for piano and orchestra (later to become the first movement of the Piano Concerto) and the Symphony in D minor.

Schumann conceived his D minor symphony as a single, extended musical movement. It's the most compact of his four symphonies, clearly driven by an effort to unify the themes of all four movements – as Schubert had done in the *Wanderer* Fantasy that Schumann had long admired. Schumann devised just two melodic ideas as the springboard for his entire work. First comes a rather persistent, mysterious, winding theme, moving in small steps, heard in the introduction on strings and bassoons. The theme broadens as it is embraced by full orchestra. Then, as the main movement begins, one fragment of it grows into something more energetic, on first violins. The new theme is to dominate the first movement. It recurs in the powerful introduction to the finale. The earlier theme also reappears as a response to the melancholy oboe and cello melody of the *Romanze*. It, too, continues to reappear, most clearly in the trio of the Scherzo movement.

The close relationship between themes throughout the symphony gives a compact, driven feeling to the work. When he came to revise the score in 1851, Schumann went a stage further. He decided that there should be no break between movements. He even considered calling it a "Symphonic Fantasy for Large Orchestra." Eventually the work was published as his Fourth Symphony, since he had written a Second and Third symphony in the intervening decade. But the feeling of symphonic fantasy in six sections – four movements, two of which have introductions – remains. Schumann also bridged the introductions to both the opening movement and finale with extra

thematic references, making it among the most successful of the cyclical symphonies. But the chief difference between the versions of the symphony lies in its orchestration. In the revised version Schumann, an unreliable conductor by all accounts, left no orchestral entry to chance, and doubled everything. Playing and conducting, however, have both

improved since the mid 19th century and the revised version is usually played today. "I have orchestrated the symphony afresh," Schumann wrote to a conductor, "and it is certainly better and more effective than it used to be."

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Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

Biographies

A conductor renowned for the versatility of his repertoire and the depth of his musical interpretations, **DAVID BRISKIN** has been the Music Director and Principal Conductor of The National Ballet of Canada since 2006. In July 2008, he was appointed Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music and Conductor of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Prior to his appointment with the National Ballet, Mr. Briskin served as conductor with the American Ballet Theatre for seven years, leading performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York's City Center and in major opera houses throughout the world.

On demand as a guest conductor, Mr. Briskin has appeared with numerous ballet and modern dance companies throughout North America, including, among others, the New York City Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet. He also served as Conductor for The Juilliard School's Dance Division from 1993-2005. Later this season, he will make his debut at Covent Garden in London conducting the Royal Ballet.

In addition to his work in dance, Mr. Briskin has enjoyed great success on the concert stage. He has conducted the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Windsor, Syracuse, Akron, Cincinnati Pops, and Singapore Symphony Orchestras; the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Juilliard Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica where

he conducted the Latin American premiere of John Corigliano's monumental First Symphony.

Equally at home in the opera house, Mr. Briskin's opera schedule has taken him throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, including performances of *La Boheme* in Italy; with the Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Columbus, New England Conservatory, Sarasota Opera, and Lake George Opera. For six years he served as the Music Director of the Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra, conducting annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Briskin attended the Indiana University School of Music, and received a Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a Master of Arts degree from Queens College, City University of New York.

Known for his musical imagination, and conviction on stage, **OMAR HO** is an emerging artist to be reckoned with. His passion for orchestral music led him to playing with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (side-by-side concerts), Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra, University of Toronto Symphony, and the Orford Arts Centre Wind Octet Faculty. Omar has been awarded scholarships from Alain Trudel, the Orford Arts Centre, Womens Musical Club of Toronto, and the Toronto Musician's Association. He is

a UTSO Concerto Competition winner and this past July, received 3rd prize in the International Woodwind Festival in Iowa.

Omar is in his 3rd year of the Clarinet Performance program studying with David Bourque and additionally with

Max Christie. He has also participated in masterclasses with Wenzel Fuchs (principal clarinetist of the Berlin Philharmonic), James Campbell, Imani Winds, St. Lawrence String Quartet, and the Gryphon Trio.



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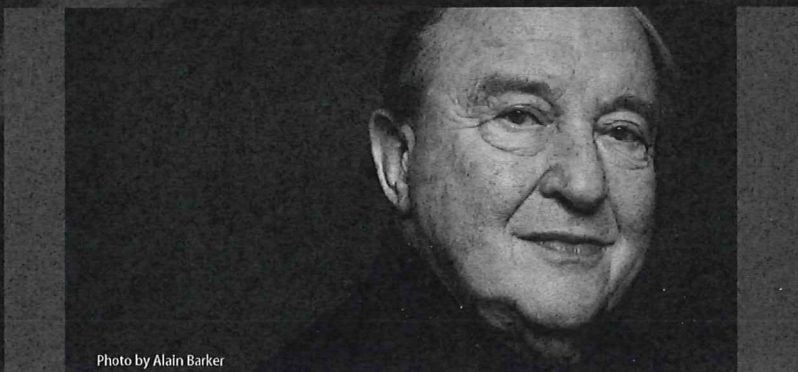


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